R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 017 582 UD 004 656

NEUTRALIZATION, A PLAN FOR DECENTRALIZATION.

CENTER FOR URBAN EDUCATION, NEW YORK, N.Y.

PUB DATE 28 AUG 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.16 2P.

DESCRIPTORS- *DECENTRALIZATION, *SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP, *COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS, *COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, *COLLEGE SCHOOL COOPERATION, GRADE 4, TEACHER AIDES, INDIGENOUS PERSONNEL, INSERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION, READING INSTRUCTION, TEACHER RESPONSIBILITY, PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION, PROJECT BEACON, PS 129, NEW YORK CITY

A SATURATION COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAM IN A BEDFORD-STUYVESANT (NEW YORK CITY) PUBLIC SCHOOL IS BEING ORGANIZED BY PROJECT BEACON OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY. THE 140 PUPILS IN THE FOURTH GRADE WILL BE HETEROGENEOUSLY GROUPED AND THEN GROUPED BY TALENT IN THE AREAS OF ART, MUSIC, AND DRAMA. AN EXPERIMENTAL CURRICULUM, INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION, SMALLER CLASSES, INTENSIVE GUIDANCE SERVICES, AND A PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM ARE FEATURES OF THIS EXPERIMENT. THERE WILL BE EIGHT TEACHERS ASSIGNED TO THE PROJECT, SIX OF THEM IN CHARGE OF CLASSES, ONE CLUSTER TEACHER, AND ONE TEACHER SPECIALIST. COMMUNITY RESIDENTS WILL FILL TWO PARENT-SCHOOL LIAISON POSTS AND SEVERAL POSITIONS AS SCHOOL AIDES. ANOTHER FEATURE OF THE PROJECT IS A "CRASH" READING PROGRAM FOR 100 OF THE MOST DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS AND POOREST READERS IN GRADES THREE TO SIX. PROJECT BEACON WILL OFFER INSERVICE TRAINING TO THE ENTIRE SCHOOL TEACHING STAFF. A COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE WILL SIT ON THE GOVERNING BOARD, WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE FOR EVALUATING THE PROJECT, AND AT A LATER TIME WORKSHOPS WILL BE DESIGNED TO PREPARE PARENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SCHOOL'S MANAGEMENT. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "THE CENTER FORUM," VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2. (NH)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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to fund any unit in excess of what would normally be allocated to the schools. The board's position is that an experimental budget greatly in excess of normal conditions will prove nothing about the feasibility of decentralizing and community involvement, since the system cannot maintain the excess.

It is not clear why there is such insistence on this tight financial lock. For it is well known that all three units expect to draw funds from any one of several constellations floating around the schools. These include the Human Resources Administration, the State Education Department, the education-industry axis, the universities, the urban philanthropies (such as Ford).

In any case, while the board has obviously given some thought to this issue and certain others involved in decentralization, there are some legal and administrative ones that it seems to have overlooked.

There is no provision in the school's table of organization, for example, for such categories as governing boards and unit administrators, nor is there any for community liaison workers in the school.

jects. Whether the state will attempt to implement its own plan if the city's plan does not meet the standards set up by the state is not clear.

Last week, the lay board, almost forgotten in this increasingly complex panorama (the image is of someone waiting to come in on a jump-rope game), named its own seven-man advisory and evaluating committee with John Niemeyer, president of the Bank Street College of Education, as chairman.

A Mandate for Change?

The committee, also volunteers, will examine the efforts of the superintendent and his staff to bring about decentralization beyond the minimal administrative measures. It will advise the board but conduct no research. It will also try to determine if the range of experiments is adequate or wise. The mandate it is committed to is the one of having the schools returned to a more meaningful relation with the respective communities, and to determine if the change results in improved instruction.

Clearly, decentralization and what it promises about community involvement is a powerful notion, perhaps particularly now, when the

Neutralization

A Plan for Decentralization?

When the Ford Foundation made public its support to the three multi-school units, it also announced a $28,000 grant to a one-school experiment at PS 129 in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a school with one of the poorest achievement records in the city. The joint announcement belied the fact that the Brooklyn experiment, as it is being mounted, is only incidentally concerned with decentralization in terms of community involvement. Its focus is on compensatory education. If this experiment has relevance to decentralization as the board has defined it, the relevance will show itself only over the long haul, perhaps as a prototype for developing decentralization—that is, as a means, not the end.

The experiment, based primarily on research conducted at Yeshiva University's Project Beacon and tested in separate pieces over a period of time, was conceived originally fifth of what they might have been.

Thus, instead of a whole school, there is only one grade involved in what Dr. Gordon calls a saturation program. The 140-pupil fourth grade will be reorganized on a heterogeneous basis, and into talent groupings in the areas of art, music, and drama. The pupils will be given experimental curricula, individual and small group instruction, smaller classes, and intensive guidance service, and to this will be attached a program involving their parents.

Grade four was chosen because of evidence that maintains the reading problem becomes acute there, Dr. Gordon said.

Eight teachers, most of them Project-Beacon-trained, will be assigned to the grade: six in charge of 23-pupil classes, one cluster teacher, and one in charge of curriculum development, small group instruction, and remedial reading for the grade. Each will be assisted by Project Beacon graduate stu-

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In any case, while the board has obviously given some thought to this issue and certain others involved in decentralization, there are some legal and administrative ones that it seems to have overlooked.

There is no provision in the school's table of organization, for example, for such categories as governing boards and unit administrators, nor is there any for community liaison workers in the school. There is also a state education law that prohibits employers from being their own employees. Would a teacher on a governing board be violating that law?

Meanwhile, there are numerous shadow plans designed by nonschool groups, all waiting to be danced out at the appropriate moment. In May, for example, the Board of Regents, with the State Education Department, appointed Norman Kurland, director of the Education Department's Center on Innovation, to help prepare the criteria for evaluating whatever decentralization plan materializes. Mr. Kurland's approach takes two tacks. In one, he said, he is trying to come up with a solution of his own. In the second, he has asked a number of university people to serve on a volunteer panel that would develop criteria for decentralization proposals. He has also asked Dr. Lawrence Cremin, president of the Bank Street College of Education, as chairman.

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Clearly, decentralization and what it promises about community involvement is a powerful notion, perhaps particularly now, when the sense of powerlessness in the society seems to have grown so strong. It is worth noting in this context that one of the things that set apart the American revolution from all those that went before it and came after it (as Hannah Arendt pointed out in her study *On Revolution*) was that the Americans knew that freedom consisted in having a share in public business, and that the activities connected with this business by no means constituted a burden but gave those who discharged them a feeling of happiness they could acquire nowhere else. Whether the schools in decentralizing can or will be permitted to provide this experience for people is one of the basic questions to which the events of the coming school year may provide an answer.

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The experiment, based primarily on research conducted at Yeshiva University's Project Beacon and tested in separate pieces over a period of time, was conceived originally as a comprehensive test, a culmination, of these separate ideas and practices. The original plan encompassed the entire school. The board promised $500,000 for it.

But after Ford arranged for the planning grant, the board cut its appropriation to $100,000 because of citywide financial problems, and the size of the experiment had to be pared accordingly. All the elements are intact, according to Dr. Sol Gordon, director of Project Beacon (through whom the planning grant was made), but their depth, as he puts it, is a

music, and drama. The pupils will be given experimental curricula, individual and small group instruction, smaller classes, and intensive guidance service, and to this will be attached a program involving their parents.

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Community residents will fill two parent-school liaison posts, and several positions as school aides. The liaison people will help run PTA meetings and workshops for fourth-grade parents, visit homes, and try to organize such things as block associations and vest-pocket parks. The school aides will include, according to the plan, four or five youth gang leaders to help "neutralize" the much-vandalized school. Dropouts will also be used, in an effort to encourage them to return to school.

governing board made up of one parent and one teacher representative from each school elected by the parent associations and UFT chapters; five community representatives elected by parents from names submitted by community organizations; two supervisory representatives, one from the junior high school level and the other from the common branch chosen by the unit's supervisory people; an ex-officio UFT representative; and one univerity representative chosen by the rest of the governing board from among university people who had assisted in developing the program.

The proposal also calls for the governing board to have the power to select personnel, initiate programs, request budget appropriations and allocate allotments, and apply directly for federal, state and private funds to supplement the regular budget. It wants the unit administrator to draw his qualifications from either city or state standards for principals, and it wants the administrator to be able to hire qualified principals from outside the state.

Mr. McCoy presented Dr. Donovan with the Ocean Hill proposal

the principal has been on an extended leave and is not expected back.

The parents want the governing board to be given the opportunity to name principals for these openings—with no state restrictions—as the initial step of implementing its program.

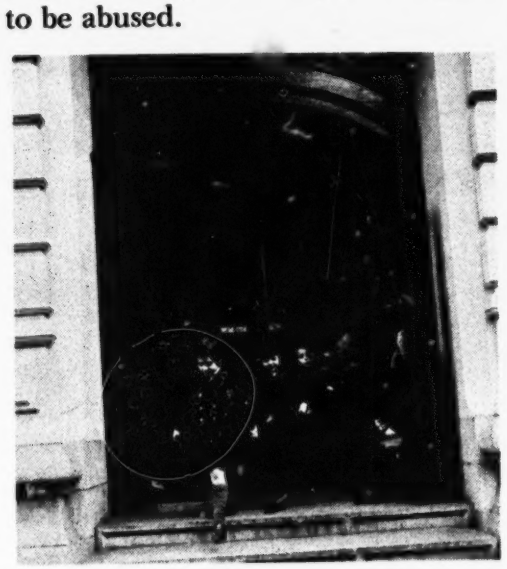
They also want IS 55 opened and the decentralization program started next month.

Teachers and Supervisors

In the past few weeks, however, it has become increasingly evident that even if the board gives its immediate approval to the Ocean Hill proposal, teaching staffs of some of the schools would try to block the project.

THE UFT, according to its president, Albert Shanker, officially supports decentralization. Teachers have been actively involved in the planning phase in all three test units. But there is no denying, Mr. Shanker said recently, that many of the teachers now working in the IS 201 and Ocean Hill units are reacting negatively to the proposals. [illegible] parent participation only

boards might be. There are too many unanswered questions, he says, particularly about the management of funds, control over personnel, and the means of arbitrating or mediating disagreements within the governing board. The union, he said, will not permit any of its rights to be abused.



Mr. Shanker is also reluctant to refer to the proposed units as experiments. "They're forerunners of a program that is going to be established, which will radically alter the power relationships in the schools. Whether it will benefit education remains to be seen. The parents could help solve many problems we are faced with in the classroom."

motherhood.) There is also dissatisfaction that the governing boards include many teachers but have little if any representation of the supervisory level. So far, there is no representation at IS 201. There is to be one principal on the board at Two Bridges. Ocean Hill's proposal includes slots for two supervisory representatives.

One line of criticism offered by supervisory personnel is that all of the benefits of decentralization as it is currently conceived have always been available to an assertive principal and district superintendent, including authority over budget, personnel, education, and community participation. But it is also admitted that the majority of supervisory level personnel do not assert themselves in this way.

Decentralization for most supervisory people in the system comes down to a political consideration. Theoretically they stand to benefit from the change, but most of them are dubious about how theory will be played out in practice.

Swinging About in the Middle

The school board's commitment, at this point, is only to the concept that there can be participation be-

supervisory people; an ex-officio UFT representative; and one univerity representative chosen by the rest of the governing board from among university people who had assisted in developing the program.

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Mr. McCoy presented Dr. Donovan with the Ocean Hill proposal August 1. Two days later 1,000 parents voted for their governing board representatives. Community workers will canvass the remaining 800 registrants during the next few weeks to give them an opportunity to vote. The parents associations have already elected their representatives. The teacher election is scheduled for September.

Dr. Donovan's first reaction to the proposal, it was learned, was limited to its last point, the issue of out-of-state principals. He asserted that principals would have to come from existing city lists to conform with state regulations. Mr. McCoy reportedly has asked Commissioner Allen for a ruling. The point is of immediate relevance and importance to Ocean Hill which has five principal openings—among them, one in the yet-to-be-opened IS 55 and another in a feeder where next month.

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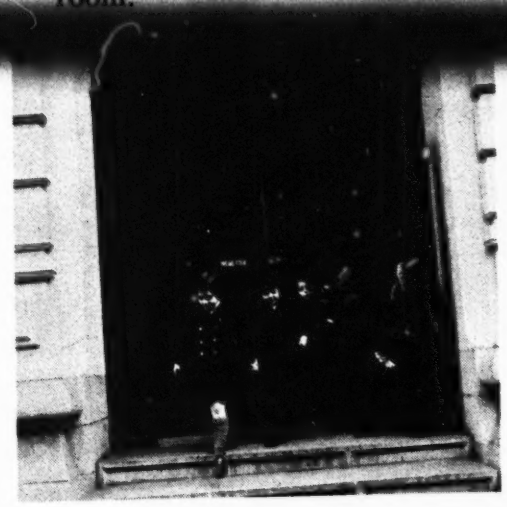
In the past few weeks, however, it has become increasingly evident that even if the board gives its immediate approval to the Ocean Hill proposal, teaching staffs of some of the schools would try to block the project.

THE UFT, according to its president, Albert Shanker, officially supports decentralization. Teachers have been actively involved in the planning phase in all three test units. But there is no denying, Mr. Shanker said recently, that many of the teachers now working in the IS 201 and Ocean Hill units are reacting negatively to the proposals. They see parent participation only as a mechanism aimed at constraining them, he said. The union worked at selling the proposals to its members, Mr. Shanker asserted.

But attacks on teachers in Brooklyn schools, he said, during the last two weeks of the school year resulted in hysteria setting in, which can only be ameliorated by time, Mr. Shanker maintained.

He feels the parents are being too cavalier in their attitude toward teachers. Parents at Ocean Hill maintain that teachers will be given the option of transferring out or participating, but not of blocking the experiment. "The parents forget the problem of getting staff is going to be one of recruitment, not selection," Mr. Shanker says.

He finds it difficult at this point to define what the dominant teacher attitude toward elected school



Mr. Shanker is also reluctant to refer to the proposed units as experiments. "They're forerunners of a program that is going to be established, which will radically alter the power relationships in the schools. Whether it will benefit education remains to be seen. The parents could help solve many problems we are faced with in the classroom."

"But the move for common participation hasn't had a very sophisticated origin. It's origin has been bitter, although the bitterness is damn justified. That doesn't mean it won't change. But it's not all going to be pleasant, and it may not happen as fast as the parents want. I can't conceive of implementing any of these proposals before February."

The Council of Supervisory Associations has offered no public position on the model units. In private, a good deal of skepticism is expressed, both about the board's commitment and the experiment's practicality, (educationally and administratively) even while there is praise for the concept of community involvement. (Everyone praises the concept in fact. It carries the same sense of inviolability as

of the benefits of decentralization as it is currently conceived have always been available to an assertive principal and district superintendent, including authority over budget, personnel, education, and community participation. But it is also admitted that the majority of supervisory level personnel do not assert themselves in this way.

Decentralization for most supervisory people in the system comes down to a political consideration. Theoretically they stand to benefit from the change, but most of them are dubious about how theory will be played out in practice.

Swinging About in the Middle

The school board's commitment, at this point, is only to the concept that there can be participation between professional and nonprofessional in the management of the schools. Meanwhile, it has invited the planning groups to use the professional staff and its resources in any way. According to Mr. Robinson, caretaker of the operation for Dr. Donovan, when the unit boards are constituted, they will have the same relationship to the main board as a local school board has, and the same relationship to existing local boards, including the ones they broke from, as any two local boards have with one another. The same would hold for unit administrators and district superintendents, according to Mr. Robinson. This means that Dr. Donovan would have a veto over the choice of administrators and principals.

Mr. Robinson also suggested that the school system is not likely